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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 002616

SIPDIS

NOFORN

STATE FOR AF/W, INR/AA
DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: (S//NF) NIGERIA: SULE ON BUHARI AND OBASANJO
INTRIGUES ON YAR'ADUA

REF: A. ABUJA 2232 B. ABUJA 1671

Classified By: A/Political Counselor Heather Merritt for Reasons 1.4
(b, c, & d).

¶1. (S//NF) SUMMARY: Maitama Sule (strictly protect), former Nigerian ambassador to the United Nations (1979–1983) and reported well-known confidante of President Umaru Yar'Adua, contends that the popularity of presidential aspirant Muhammadu Buhari, who is challenging the election of President Yar'Adua, is waning in the North, as northerners assess a more independent Yar'Adua and fear a loss of influence should the elections be overturned. Sule also claims former president Obasanjo believes that Yar'Adua may support an indictment him on corruption charges, and is, therefore, reportedly bribing justices of the Presidential Election Tribunal to rule against the legality of Yar'Adua's April election and call for fresh polls. In such an event, Sule remarked, Obasanjo (as Chairman of the People's Democratic Party, PDP, Board of Trustees) would choose another candidate, loyal to him to run on the party's platform. Sule claimed that former head of state Ibrahim Babangida was currently colluding with Obasanjo to engineer a comeback and run as the PDP's candidate in new elections. Without a formidable base of support within the PDP comparable to Obasanjo or Babangida, Yar'Adua would be pushed out of the PDP, Sule opined. While Sule's remarks may appear hyperbolic, it is possible that Obasanjo is feeling vulnerable as President Yar'Adua gains more independence and could possibly be looking at options, such as bribing judges, to try to retain some political prowess. Hilton Managing Director told Ambassador December 27 that when Obasanjo visited the hotel two weeks ago not only was there no fanfare, but people were visibly hostile to having him around and no one extended him the homage of the past. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (S//NF) Maitama Sule (strictly protect), former ambassador to the United Nations (1979–1983) and reported confidante of President Umaru Yar'Adua spoke with PolOff on December 19 at his Kano residence. Sule said the popularity of Muhammadu Buhari (candidate of the All Nigeria People's Party, ANPP) has significantly waned in the North, as northerners are demonstrably more satisfied with President Yar'Adua (of the People's Democratic Party, PDP), crediting Yar'Adua's perceived success in "disentangling" himself from Obasanjo for the surge in support. Whereas several northerners, Sule opined, once supported Buhari for his stand against corruption and his "electability" (in the event of a free and

fair election), Sule contended the northern elite is now wary of "forfeiting" power should Yar'Adua's election be overturned at the Presidential Election Tribunal. Upholding Yar'Adua's election, Sule explained, represented the North's "best hope" for retaining political power in the country given the uncertainty a fresh election would likely portend. (Note: Buhari and Action Congress presidential candidate Atiku Abubakar filed a joint petition contesting Yar'Adua's election. While Buhari's legal team concluded its case in December 2007, Atiku's case is stalled pending the Supreme Court's ruling on whether Atiku may call witnesses or simply remit witness depositions before the election tribunal. The Supreme Court is expected to rule January 17, 200